

PARENT HANDOUT: PARENT/CHILD SWIMMING ORIENTATION

The purpose of this program is to teach the child rules of safety in and around the water and basic swimming skills, as well as to help them develop a positive attitude while in the water. The instructor will be teaching parents how to achieve these skills with their child. Although the instructor will explain and demonstrate skills, parents will be doing much of the actual teaching. Remember, the objective is to teach children how to be safe in, on and around water.

Parent Role and Attitude

This should be a rewarding, fun experience for both you and your child. To make it so, try to keep the following points in mind.

1. Be patient and enjoy class. If you have a good time, chances are your child will too.
2. Always encourage your child - praise honest efforts.
3. Listen carefully to instructions.
4. Give your child clear, specific instructions and be consistent. For example, when the child is jumping in, signal your child with "one, two, three, go" and use the same signal every time.
5. Be willing and ready to demonstrate for your child. Children learn by imitating.
6. Keep your child busy the entire time. Don't give him/her a chance to "worry" about what's happening or to get cold.
7. Understand and accept your child's fears, but don't dwell on them. Instead, work towards developing skills that will inspire confidence in your child and help him/her overcome any apprehension.
8. If you are a non-swimmer and afraid of water, inform your instructor. Your child can sense your fears. The instructor will help you learn how to become more relaxed.
9. Don't compare your child to others. Each child progresses at his/her own rate. Don't push your child if she/he isn't ready.
10. Make a point to discuss any problems you are having with your instructor. Your instructor can help you determine what approach or technique is best for your child at a particular time.
11. Take the time to meet other members of the class. Encourage your child to play with other children. Children often learn best watching other children.

Safety

Some children progress more rapidly and feel confident in the water sooner than others. Safety cannot be stressed too much. Some children do not know their limitations and expect you to appear automatically to assist them. All children should learn and follow certain basic safety rules including the following:

1. Never swim alone or without an adult.
2. Don't run on the pool deck or in the locker room.
3. Develop pool awareness.
 - a. Learn where the shallow end is and where deep water begins.
 - b. Be aware that the most common permanently disabling aquatic injuries are to the spinal chord. Avoid shallow water diving unless under strict supervision. Educate your child as to the hazards of diving in shallow water.
4. Don't enter the water or allow your child to enter the water until the instructor says so.
5. Parents should keep children under constant supervision, accidents happen very quickly.
6. Absolutely never enter the water with gum or foreign objects in the mouth.

Practice

Once session is not enough. Try to bring your child to open public swims. You'll find they will learn a lot faster with a little extra practice and free time in the water. Learning to swim takes repetition and exposure!

Helpful Hints

1. If your child chills easily, let him/her wear a T-shirt in the water for the first few classes/sessions. It helps maintain body heat. A child can become easily chilled at beginning levels of ability because they won't be moving continually. Once some swimming skills are developed, the body will stay warmer.
2. Allow your child to get out of the water if he/she tires or becomes chilled. Wrap him or her in a towel, letting him/her sit on the edge observing. Your child can learn a lot by watching others in the water.
3. Allow time for free play and self-discovery. The more independent a child is in the water, and the more he is given an opportunity to explore how his body works in the water, the more secure he will become.
4. Avoid nose plugs. Nose plugs will hinder skill development. Swimming goggles are acceptable.

Remember, the goal of this class is not so much to teach your child to swim but to develop a positive attitude toward the water and to learn certain basic safety skills. Water adjustment is 99% of learning how to swim. When your child is ready, he will learn. Patience and persistence will be the key to success.